

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program State of California

November 2011

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency proposes to implement a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) in the State of California. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

The State of California, through the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to expand the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) program to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, and enjoy other recreational activities on private lands. California's SHARE program was designed to improve access to private land for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-dependant recreation by compensating willing landowners who provide access to their lands.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

With VPA-HIP grant funds the CDFG proposes to expand SHARE to provide recreational users access to 50,000-70,000 acres of private property, as well as allowing access to otherwise inaccessible public lands for additional wildlife dependent recreational access. The goal of the SHARE program is to provide 12,000 public user days during the 2 year VPA-HIP grant period. CDFG also plans to promote public awareness of the program through statewide outreach.

REASONS FOR FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

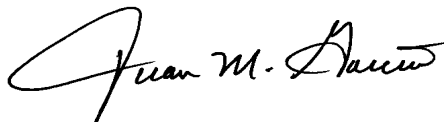
In consideration of the analysis documented in the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) and in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations 1508.27, the preferred alternative would not constitute a major State or Federal action affecting the human and natural environment. Therefore, this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following:

1. The proposed action will have long-term beneficial impacts to the hunting public from increased walk in access opportunities.
2. The preferred alternative would not affect public health or safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area (cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas) would not be negatively impacted from implementation of the preferred alternative.
4. There are no negative impacts on the quality of the human environment expected.
5. The potential impacts on the human environment as described in the PEA are not uncertain nor do they involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The preferred alternative would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. Cumulative impacts of the preferred alternative in combination with other recent, ongoing, or foreseeable future actions are not expected to be significant.
8. The preferred alternative would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
9. The preferred alternative would not have negative impacts to wildlife and their habitats, including endangered and threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
10. The preferred alternative does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law imposed for the protection of the environment.

DETERMINATION

On the basis of the analysis and information contained in the PEA and FONSI, it is my determination that adoption of the preferred alternative does not constitute a major Federal action affecting the quality of the human and natural environment. Barring any new data identified during the public and agency review of the Final PEA that would dramatically change the analysis presented in the PEA or identification of a significant controversial issue, the PEA and this FONSI are considered Final 30 days after date of initial publication of the Notice of Availability.



11/15/2011

APPROVED:

Signature

Date

**FINAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS HABITAT INCENTIVE
PROGRAM
STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



**United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency**

November 2011

Cover Sheet

Proposed Action: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the State of California have agreed to implement a new Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). USDA is provided the statutory authority by the provisions of the Food Security Act of 2008, and the Regulations at 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1410. VPA-HIP provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

Type of Document: Programmatic Environmental Assessment

Lead Agency: USDA, FSA

Sponsoring Agency: California Department of Fish and Game

Cooperating Agency: None

Comments: This Programmatic Environmental Assessment was prepared in accordance with USDA FSA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementation procedures found in 7 CFR 799, as well as the NEPA of 1969, Public Law 91190, 42 United States Code 4321-4347, 1 January 1970, as amended.

A Notice of Availability was released on November 15, 2011 announcing a 30-day comment period. A copy of the document can be found on the USDA FSA website: www.fsa.usda.gov. Comments will be accepted until December 14, 2011. Comments may be submitted via e-mail to: ybarr@dfg.ca.gov

Or via mail to the following address:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency proposes to implement a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) in the State of California. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

The State of California, through the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), proposes to implement the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). CDFG proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to expand the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) program to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, and enjoy other recreational activities on private lands.

Proposed Action

With VPA-HIP funds CDFG proposes to expand SHARE by increasing landowner participation and maximizing public participation for the activities made available by the landowner such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other activities. CDFG will expand SHARE by statewide promotion and by compensating landowners for increased public access.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to use VPA-HIP grant funds to increase public access on private farms, ranches, and forest land in the state of California. CDFG's goal is to enroll 50,000-70,000 acres of new property for additional wildlife dependent recreational access and providing 12,000 public user days during the 2 year VPA-HIP grant period.

Environmental Consequences

This Programmatic Environmental Assessment has been prepared to analyze the potential environmental consequences associated with implementing the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) or the No Action Alternative. Under the Proposed Action, CDFG would utilize VPA-HIP funds to expand enrollment in SHARE. Under the No Action Alternative, SHARE would continue as it is currently administered. The potential environmental consequences of implementing the Proposed Action would be beneficial overall to the natural environment and increase wildlife-related recreational opportunities in the state. A summary of environmental consequences is provided in Table ES-1.

Table ES-1 Summary of Environmental Consequences

Resource	Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)	No Action Alternative
Biological Resources (Wildlife and Protected Species)	An increase in enrollment in SHARE would expand hunting and fishing opportunities throughout the state. There will be no negative impacts on wildlife and protected species as hunting in the state is strictly regulated through controlled hunt licenses and tags. Increasing land available for wildlife-related recreation would result in additional land maintained in its natural state, thereby improving wildlife habitats.	SHARE would continue as it is currently administered, landowner enrollment and statewide promotion would continue to occur, but would do so at a diminished capacity due to limited funds or eliminated as a CDFG sponsored program. The additional benefits associated with expanding acreage in the program would not occur.
Recreation	Long-term beneficial impacts to recreation are expected from increasing enrollment in SHARE. This will allow more opportunities and venues for hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing throughout the state. Only positive beneficial impacts would occur to recreational resources.	VPA-HIP funding would not be available to increase the number of opportunities or venues available to the public for wildlife related recreation. Beneficial impacts from expanded recreational opportunities from the Proposed Action would not occur.
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice	Beneficial impacts to local economies from SHARE expansion would be present based on the increase of land utilization for wildlife-related recreation. An increase in sportsmen accessing the land would increase purchases such as lodging, meals, and goods. There would be no impacts to minority or low income populations; therefore, there are no environmental justice concerns.	No socioeconomic or environmental justice impacts would occur. No direct negative impacts would occur to local economies. However, any beneficial impacts from the Proposed Action would not be realized.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	
CDFG	California Department of Fish and Game
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
COHA	California Outdoor Heritage Alliance
CWA	California Waterfowl Association
EA	Environmental Assessment
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FGC	Fish and Game Code
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
GIS	Geographical Information System
LIP	Landowner Incentive Program
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PEA	Programmatic Environmental Assessment
SHARE	Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (program)
T&E	Threatened and Endangered (Species)
U.S.	United States
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USC	U.S. Code
USCB	U.S. Census Bureau
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USEPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
VPA-HIP	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

CHAPTER 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) proposes to implement a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) in the State of California. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

The VPA-HIP is a competitive grants program that is only available for state and tribal governments. The grant funding may be used to expand existing public access programs or create new public access programs, or provide incentives to improve wildlife habitat on enrolled lands. Applicable program objectives in the State of California are to:

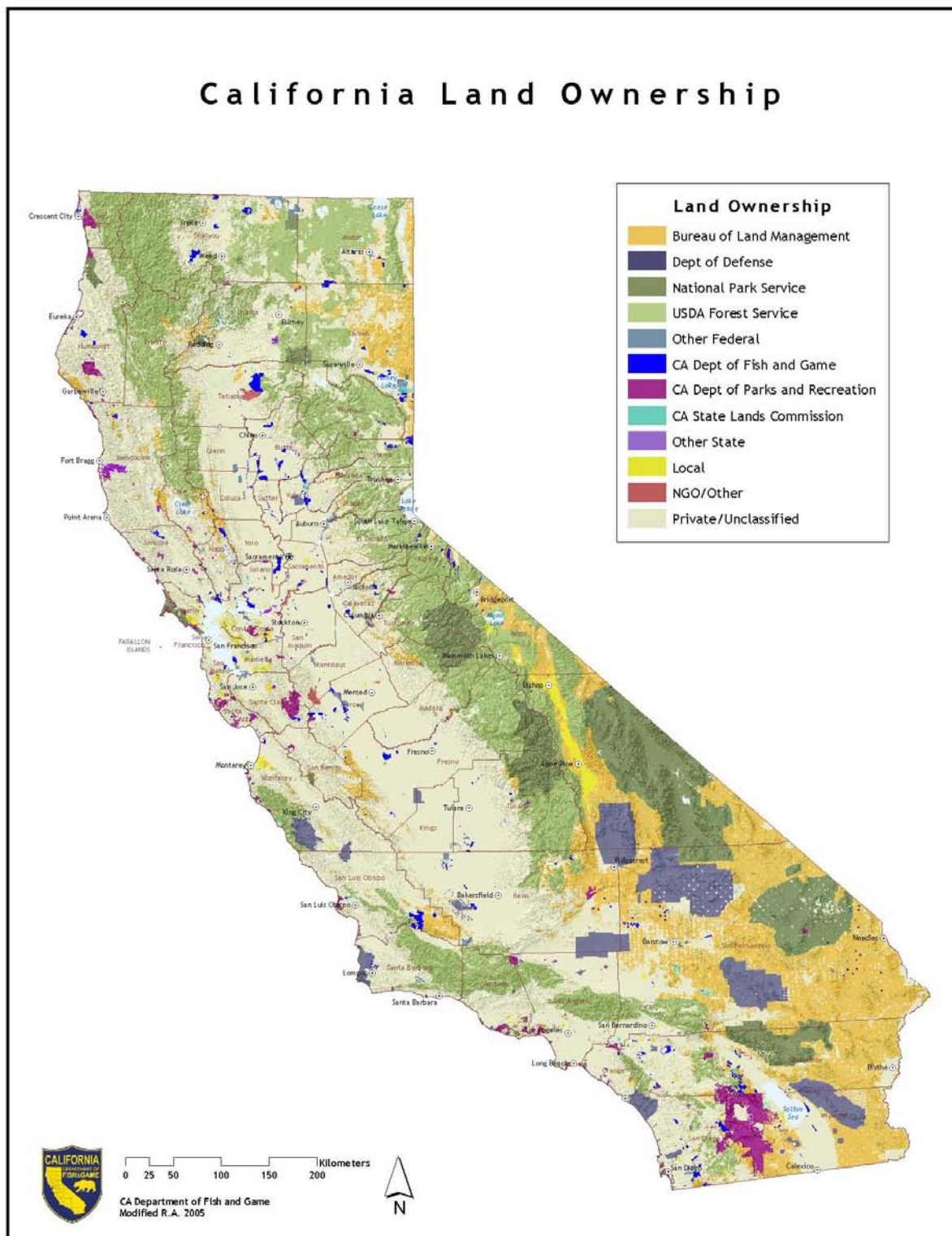
- Maximize participation by landowners;
- Ensure that land enrolled in the program has appropriate wildlife habitat;
- Supplement funding and services from other Federal, State, or tribal government or private resources; and
- Inform the public about the location of public access land.

The State of California, through the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to expand its existing Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) program to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, and enjoy other recreation on private lands.

1.1 BACKGROUND

California consists of about 155,959.34 square miles, of which approximately 52% percent is public land and 48% percent is private land (Figure 1-1). Because of this land ownership pattern, private landowners often have control over high-quality wildlife habitat or have the legal right to lock roads leading through their property to State and Federal lands. The SHARE pilot program was established in 2003 to open up some of this private and land locked public land to the public for wildlife dependant recreational activities. The California Outdoor Heritage Alliance (COHA), in cooperation with the CDFG, the California Waterfowl Association (CWA), the California Cattleman's Association (CCA), and the California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF), offered public hunting opportunities on private lands for migratory and upland game birds from 2003-2009. The pilot program was a success and with the hiring of a SHARE Program coordinator in December 2009, CDFG is expanding SHARE from a small, regional pilot program for waterfowl to a statewide private lands access program for all wildlife dependent recreational opportunities.

Figure 1-1 California Land Ownership



1.2 THE PROPOSED ACTION

With VPA-HIP grant funds the CDFG proposes to expand SHARE to provide recreational users access to 50,000-70,000 acres of private land, as well as allowing access to otherwise inaccessible public lands. CDFG also plans to promote public awareness of the program through statewide outreach.

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to use VPA-HIP grant funds to increase the total acres of private land available of public access through enrollment in SHARE. The need for the Proposed Action is to: increase availability of hunting, fishing, and wildlife-related recreational opportunities in California; increase access to landlocked public lands; and enhance landowner and public awareness of the program.

1.4 REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

This Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190, 42 United States Code 4321 et seq.); implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508); and FSA implementing regulations, Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA (7 CFR 799). The intent of NEPA is to protect, restore, and enhance the natural and human environment through well-informed Federal decisions. A variety of laws, regulations, and Executive Orders (EOs) apply to actions undertaken by Federal agencies and form the basis of the analysis presented in this PEA.

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF PEA

This PEA assesses the potential impacts of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative on potentially affected environmental and economic resources.

- Chapter 1.0 provides background information relevant to the Proposed Action, and discusses its purpose and need.
- Chapter 2.0 describes the Proposed Action and alternatives.
- Chapter 3.0 describes the baseline conditions (i.e., the conditions against which potential impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives are measured) for each of the potentially affected resources and the potential environmental impacts to those resources.
- Chapter 4.0 describes potential cumulative impacts and irreversible and irretrievable resource commitments.
- Chapter 5.0 discusses mitigation measures utilized to reduce or eliminate impacts to protected resources.
- Chapter 6.0 contains a list of the persons and agencies contacted during the preparation of this document.
- Chapter 7.0 contains references.
- Chapter 8.0 lists the preparers of this document.

CHAPTER 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

The CDFG proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds of \$1,019,816 (\$509,908 in 2011 and \$509,908 in 2012 if funding is extended) to expand SHARE to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, and enjoy other recreation on private lands. VPA-HIP funds would be used to expand SHARE by increasing landowner participation and maximizing public participation for the activities made available by the landowner such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other activities. CDFG's goal is to enroll 50,000-70,000 acres of new property for additional wildlife dependent recreational access and providing 12,000 public user days during the 2 year VPA-HIP grant period. The Proposed Action would not result in any land use changes, or disturbances to the ground or vegetation.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES

CEQ regulations (40 CFR §1502.14) require the lead agency to identify all reasonable alternatives for implementing a Proposed Action. The Federal Register notice announcing the rule for VPA-HIP (Vol. 75(130), page 39135) explicitly states the purpose of VPA-HIP is to provide grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. Each VPA-HIP application received by USDA FSA underwent a selection screening process to identify those proposals that met the program objectives (listed in Introduction Section 1.0).

The CDFG considered using VPA-HIP grant funds for more habitat improvement activities, however it was determined that there were already sufficient funding sources for habitat improvement and other programs that could provide that service. CDFG decided to use the majority of VPA-HIP funds to provide incentive payments for public access and to promote SHARE statewide. This would maximize landowner participation and increase the total of lands available for wildlife dependant recreation in California.

2.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, the use of VPA-HIP funds would not occur in California. The absence of Federal funding would not allow for the expansion of SHARE. Landowner enrollment and statewide promotion would continue to occur, but would do so at a diminished capacity due to limited funds. Additionally, none of the potential beneficial monetary impacts from increased incentive payouts to landowners would occur. Any indirect economic benefits from the increased incentive payouts and increased wildlife recreational opportunities would also not occur. The No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the Proposed Action, but is being carried forward in accordance with CEQ regulations to serve as the baseline against which potential impacts of the Proposed Action are measured.

2.4 RESOURCES ELIMINATED FROM ANALYSIS

CEQ regulations (40 CFR §1501.7) state that the lead agency shall identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not important or which have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they would not have a dramatic effect on the human or natural environment.

As described above, the Proposed Action consists of expanding SHARE enrollment and statewide promotion. No habitat improvement projects would be funded with VPA-HIP grants funds; therefore, there would be no ground disturbing activities undertaken by this Proposed Action. Thus, from a programmatic level, the Proposed Action should have little to no negative impact on the following resource areas:

Noise. The Proposed Action would not create any new permanent sources of noise to the environment. Expanding SHARE may introduce gunfire noise on lands where public hunting may not be currently occurring. This noise would be intermittent and occur during daylight hours during specified hunting seasons. In addition, the requisite size of land needed for safe hunting would reduce the potential for gunfire noise to be heard outside the property. No construction activities are associated with the Proposed Action that could temporarily increase noise levels in an area, therefore noise has been eliminated from analysis.

Human Health and Safety. No components of the Proposed Action would directly impact human health or safety. The goal of the Proposed Action is to increase public access to privately-held land that supports an abundance of wildlife, thereby allowing hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation. While hunting does pose a slight safety risk, this activity would occur on private land with controlled access. California hunting regulations require hunters to receive the appropriate education and meet minimum age requirements before a license can be issued.

Land Use. The Proposed Action would not result in any changes to land use designations. The Proposed Action would occur on private lands on a voluntary basis and would not require the alteration of land use.

Transportation. No aspect of the Proposed Action entails any alteration of the current transportation system in the State of California. Increasing acreage available for enrollment in SHARE could cause an increase in the number of vehicles traveling to SHARE areas. However, it is highly unlikely this would be considered an impact to the transportation system, but rather a redistribution of vehicular traffic.

Cultural Resources. The Proposed Action would not directly or indirectly impact any cultural resources, either architectural or archaeological. The Proposed Action does not allow for purposeful destruction of any cultural resources and no ground disturbance would occur. Therefore, no impacts to cultural resources would occur.

Soils. Under the Proposed Action, no direct soil disturbance would occur. Increasing enrollment in SHARE could increase foot traffic through new areas, but this impact to soils would be

minimal. No new road or trails would be constructed under SHARE and vehicular travel would occur only on existing roads and trails. Therefore, no direct adverse impacts to soils would occur.

Coastal Zones. California is a coastal state and as such is bound to manage coastal resources as stipulated by the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. No habitat improvement activities would occur in any coastal areas. Therefore no impacts to the coastal zones would occur.

Other Formally Classified Lands. The Proposed Action can only be implemented on privately owned lands. The only formal classification applicable on private land would be Prime and Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. The Proposed Action would not include removing these lands from agricultural production. Therefore, there would be no impacts to any other formally classified lands.

CHAPTER 3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter provides a description of the existing environmental conditions that have the potential to be affected from implementation of the Proposed Action and the potential environmental impacts that may occur to those resources. Resource areas potentially impacted by the Proposed Action and covered in this PEA include:

- Biological Resources (Wildlife and Protected Species)
- Recreation
- Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

As described in Chapter 2, this PEA describes the potential impacts from implementing VPA-HIP funds in the State of California on a programmatic level. Environmental consequences to each resource area are described for the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) and the No Action Alternative:

- Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative): utilize VPA-HIP funds to expand SHARE by statewide promotion and by compensating landowners for increased public access.
- No Action Alternative: continuation of SHARE as it is currently administered or eliminated as a CDFG sponsored program. Landowner enrollment and statewide promotion would continue to occur, but would do so at a diminished capacity due to limited funds.

3.1 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Biological resources are any living features of the natural environment that add to the intrinsic value of the local area. In this PEA, biological resources include wildlife and protected species. Biological resources are included in this PEA because an increase in enrollment acreage throughout the state has the potential to result in long-term positive improvements to the natural environment by maintaining feasible wildlife habitat rather than allowing it to be converted to an incompatible use. Also, expanding the public access program and increasing hunting and fishing opportunities may increase the potential for impacting game populations. As such, wildlife species discussed are only those game species that may be potentially impacted through increased hunting and fishing.

3.1.1 Affected Environment

The Proposed Action covers the entire state. A very brief overview of the ecological regions of the state and the wildlife that could potentially be impacted by increased hunting is described in section 3.1.1.1. Protected species that could be impacted are described in section 3.1.1.2.

3.1.1.1 Wildlife

California has a wide variety of wildlife species that are spread throughout the diverse habitat types found within the state. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lists thirteen Level III ecological regions that are found within California: Coast Range, Klamath Mountains/California High North Coast Range, Cascades, Eastern Cascades Slopes and Foothills, Northern Basin and Range, Central Basin and Range, Sierra Nevada, Central California Foothills and Coastal Mountains, Central California Valley, Mojave Basin and Range, Southern California Mountains, Southern California/North Baja Coast, and Sonoran Basin and Range (USEPA 2011).

These ecological regions support a wide variety of wildlife, which include numerous game species. Game species in California are categorized as big game, upland game, waterfowl, and resident small game. Big game species include deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, black bear, and wild pig. Upland game species include pheasant, quail, chukar, grouse, ptarmigan, partridge, wild turkey, dove, band-tailed pigeon, and snipe. Waterfowl species include various ducks, geese, and coots. Resident small game species include rabbits, hares, and tree squirrels. (FGC §3683 and §3950).

3.1.1.2 Protected Species

The state of California contains numerous species that are protected under the Federal and State Endangered Species Act. The California Wildlife Action Plan lists protected species that are found within the state and details the actions being taken in the state to protect these species and the habitats that support them (CDFG 2007). Protected species that can be hunted in California include migrating waterfowl (which are protected under the Migratory Bird treaty Act of 1918) and bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*). The hunting of migratory waterfowl and bighorn sheep in California is controlled by strict licensing and is conducted under the approval of the California Fish and Game Commission.

3.1.2 Environmental Consequences

Impacts to biological resources would be considered significant if activities resulted in reducing sustainable wildlife or fisheries populations to a level of concern or the incidental take of a protected species or its habitat.

3.1.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)

Wildlife

Under the Proposed Action, CDFG would use VPA-HIP funds to expand enrollment in SHARE by offering monetary compensation to private landowners to provide public access to their property. The increase in land enrollment in SHARE would open more private land to public hunting, which also ensures that the land is maintained in its natural state. Also, the increase in enrollment could potentially grant access to previously inaccessible public lands. An increase in hunting on these lands is not likely to impact game species populations because the hunting of

these species is regulated by the California Fish and Game Commission through controlled seasons and hunt quotas. Seasons and hunt quotas are used to limit the take of certain game species based on population size and carrying capacity of habitats throughout the state. Expanding participation in the current programs and increasing hunting opportunities would not result in adverse impacts to game species' populations given the existing CDFG monitoring and regulatory change process, and there is the potential for long-term positive benefits to wildlife due to the increase in maintained natural habitat on private lands.

Protected Species

Under the Proposed Action, CDFG would use VPA-HIP funds to expand enrollment of SHARE by offering monetary compensation to private landowners to provide public access to their property. The increase in land enrollment in SHARE would open more private land in California to public hunters. Federal and state laws prohibit the killing of most protected species, so these species would not be impacted by the Proposed Action. Protected species that can be hunted in California include migrating waterfowl (which are protected under the Migratory Bird treaty Act of 1918) and bighorn sheep. The hunting of migratory waterfowl and bighorn sheep in California is controlled by strict licensing and is conducted under the approval of the California Fish and Game Commission. Because of this licensing and approval process an increase in private land open to hunting in California would have no negative impact to Protected Species. Under the Proposed Action there is the potential for long-term positive benefits to protected species due to the increase in maintained natural habitat on private lands.

3.1.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no use of VPA-HIP funds to increase enrollment in SHARE. There would be no expansion of SHARE related hunting opportunities on private lands in California meaning that under the No Action Alternative there would be no impacts to Biological Resources. SHARE would continue as it is currently administered, landowner enrollment and statewide promotion would continue to occur, but would do so at a diminished capacity due to limited funds or eliminated as a CDFG sponsored program.

3.2 RECREATION

Recreation includes those outdoor activities that take place away from the residence of the participant. The State of California offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities to its residents. Recreational activities that are common in California include hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, camping, horseback riding, boating, skiing, hiking, biking, and using off-road vehicles. For this PEA, recreation focuses on hunting and fishing opportunities and other wildlife-related recreational activities available to the public in the State of California.

3.2.1 Affected Environment

Hunting in the State of California is regulated by the California Fish and Game Commission, and a valid hunting license is required to hunt within the state. These licenses are valid from July 1 to June 30 of the following year. When combined with the appropriate additional stamps/tags these licenses can be used to hunt big and small game, including most waterfowl and upland game species. Licenses and stamps can be obtained online, through a CDFG office, or at local retail stores. Each year, some controlled hunt tags can only be obtained through public drawings (CDFG 2011).

Like hunting, fishing is also regulated by the California Fish and Game Commission. To legally fish in California, anyone who is 16 years of age or older is required to purchase a fishing license. For California residents, these licenses last for one day, two days or for the calendar year, expiring on December 31. All fishing licenses can be obtained online, through a CDFG office, or at local retail stores (CDFG 2011). Some of the most commonly fished species in California include bass, trout, catfish, and salmon.

Other wildlife-related recreational activities in California include wildlife viewing and photography. California contains numerous State and National parks, national forests, and wildlife refuges that can be utilized for wildlife viewing and photography.

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences

Impacts to recreation would be considered significant if they drastically reduced, increased, or removed available public lands designated for recreation or significantly degraded the quality of the recreation. Impacts to environmental conditions such as air, water, or biological resources within or near public recreational land in such a way to affect its use would also be considered significant.

3.2.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)

The Proposed Action has the potential to provide long-term, beneficial impacts to recreational resources in the State of California. Increasing enrollment in SHARE would allow more opportunities and venues for hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing on private property. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have long-term, beneficial impacts to recreational resources in California.

3.2.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, VPA-HIP funds would not be used to increase SHARE enrollment. There would be no expansion of SHARE related recreational opportunities in California; therefore, under the No Action Alternative there would be no impacts to existing recreational resources. SHARE would continue as it is currently administered, landowner enrollment and statewide promotion would continue to occur, but would do so at a diminished capacity due to limited funds or eliminated as a CDFG sponsored program.

3.3 SOCIOECONOMICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Socioeconomics for this PEA includes an investigation of population and demographic statistics as well as a discussion on the potential income from enrollment in SHARE.

EO 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, requires a Federal agency to “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing as appropriate, disproportionately high human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.” A minority population can be defined by race, by ethnicity, or by a combination of the two classifications.

According to CEQ, a minority is defined as being one of the following groups: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, not of Hispanic origin, or Hispanic. A minority population is defined as one of these groups exceeding 50 percent of the population in an area or the minority population percentage of the affected area is meaningfully greater than the minority population percentage in the general population (CEQ 1997). The U.S. Census Bureau defines ethnicity as either being of Hispanic origin or not being of Hispanic origin. Hispanic origin is further defined as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture of origin regardless of race” (USCB 2001).

Each year the USCB defines the national poverty thresholds, which are measured in terms of household income and are dependent upon the number of persons within the household. Individuals falling below the poverty threshold are considered low-income individuals. USCB census tracts where at least 20 percent of the residents are considered poor are known as poverty areas (USCB 1995). When the percentage of residents considered poor is greater than 40 percent, the census tract is considered an extreme poverty area.

3.3.1 Affected Environment

3.3.1.1 Population and Demographics

The state of California leads the nation with an estimated population of 37.3 million as of June 2011. Between the years 2000 and 2010, California had a growth rate of 20% compared to a growth rate of 9.7% of the nation as a whole. Long-term projections for the population of California show a population of 46.4 million by the year 2030. California’s population is predominately white, with 57.6% of 2010 residents claiming this ethnicity. Asian origin ranked second at 13%, followed by Black or African American (6.2%), American Indian and Alaska Native (1%), and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (0.4%). Persons reporting some other race alone accounted for 17%, while persons reporting two or more races accounted for 4.9 % of the population. Within these racial designations, persons who indicated Hispanic or Latino origin totaled 37.6%. In 2009, California’s average household income was \$58,925 and average per capita income was \$29,020. The percent of residents below poverty level in 2009 was 14.2% closely reflecting the national average 14.3%. Of the current California population, 80.5% of all residents age 25 or older have attained a high school degree with 29.7% of persons over age 25 having attained a bachelor’s degree or higher. (USCB QuickFacts)

3.3.1.2 Private Landowner Income from SHARE

The Proposed Action has the potential to directly impact privately owned farms, ranches, and forest land throughout the state. In 2009 there were 81,500 farms in California encompassing 25,364,695 acres within the state. This is approximately 25% of California's land and yields an average farm size of 313 acres (USDA). With average farmland real estate prices of \$6600 per acre, the average value of all assets including land and buildings is \$2,006,173 per farm (USCB Statistical Abstract).

Landowners that are eligible for inclusion in SHARE receive annual compensation payments based on available acres, the quality of wildlife habitat and wildlife dependent recreational opportunities offered, and the number of people accessing the property. Landowners can currently enroll in SHARE for varying contract periods. SHARE currently enrolls 6530 acres of private land at a cost of \$40,000 in payments to landowners enrolled in the program.

3.3.2 Environmental Consequences

Significance of an impact to socioeconomics varies depending on the setting of the Proposed Action, but 40 CFR 1508.8 states that effects may include those that induce changes in the pattern of land use, population density, or growth rate.

Environmental justice is achieved when everyone, regardless of race, culture, or income, enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and has equal access to the decision-making process. Significant environmental justice impacts would result if access to decision-making documents was denied or if any adverse environmental effects occurred that would disproportionately affect minority or low-income populations.

3.3.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)

Under the Proposed Action, CDFG will use VPA-HIP grant funds totaling \$1,019,816 (\$509,908 in 2011 and \$509,908 in 2012 if funding is extended) to expand SHARE to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, and enjoy other forms of recreation on private lands. VPA-HIP funds would be used to expand SHARE by increasing landowner participation and maximizing public participation for the activities made available by the landowner such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other activities.

Ultimately, the added monetary compensation would offer a slight, direct economic benefit to eligible landowners. This would also have a slight beneficial impact to local economies. Increasing hunting opportunities or allowing access to previously inaccessible hunting lands and rivers could also bring indirect economic benefits through traveling hunters, anglers, and other recreational users needing lodging, meals, and other goods. Additionally, with the increase in lands available to the public there is some chance that the number of hunting licenses and tags purchased would also increase, thereby increasing the total revenue for CDFG. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have a long-term beneficial impact on socioeconomics in California.

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no disproportionate negative impact to minorities or low income populations in California. SHARE is voluntary and would only target landowners with eligible lands. Once enrolled, participants in SHARE must give equal access to all sportsmen with a valid SHARE access permit.

3.3.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, CDFG would not receive funding under the VPA-HIP. The No Action Alternative would not allow for any of the positive economic impacts from the introduction of the VPA-HIP funding into the economy, nor would it allow for the expansion of hunting and other recreational opportunities on private lands in California which also brings economic benefit via lodging and purchase of goods and supplies. SHARE would continue as it is currently administered, landowner enrollment and statewide promotion would continue to occur, but would do so at a diminished capacity due to limited funds or eliminated as a CDFG sponsored program.

CHAPTER 4.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

4.1 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

CEQ regulations stipulate that the cumulative impacts analysis within an EA should consider the potential environmental impacts resulting from “the incremental impacts of the action when added to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7). Recent CEQ guidance in considering cumulative impacts involves defining the scope of the other actions and their interrelationship with the Proposed Action. The scope must consider geographical and temporal overlaps among the Proposed Action and other actions. It must also evaluate the nature of interactions among these actions.

Cumulative impacts are most likely to arise when a relationship or synergism exists between the Proposed Action and other actions expected to occur in a similar location or during a similar time period. Actions overlapping with or in proximity to the Proposed Action would be expected to have more potential for cumulative impacts than those more geographically separated.

In this PEA, the affected environment for cumulative impacts includes all of the State of California since the public access programs are available statewide. In addition to VPA-HIP, several other Federal and state programs in California focus on conservation. Federal programs include the Partners for Wildlife Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Grassland Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, the Comprehensive Wetland Habitat Program, the Private Land Management Program, and the Landowner Incentive Program. Increasing public awareness of the presence of important wildlife and game species and activities they can do to maintain them on their properties would create an environment to support a sustained wildlife population. Therefore, cumulative impacts are expected to be beneficial to the natural environment.

4.2 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

Irreversible and irretrievable commitments are related to the use of nonrenewable resources and the effect that the use of these resources has on future generations. Irreversible effects primarily result from the use or destruction of a specific resource that cannot be replaced within a reasonable time frame. Irretrievable resource commitments involve the loss in value of an affected resource that cannot be restored as a result of the action. Under the Proposed Action, long-term beneficial impacts are expected for fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. There would be no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

CHAPTER 5.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

The purpose of mitigation is to avoid, minimize, or eliminate significant negative impacts on affected resources. CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.20) state that mitigation includes:

- Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
- Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
- Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.
- Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

CEQ regulations state that all relevant reasonable mitigation measures that could avoid or minimize significant impacts should be identified, even if they are outside the jurisdiction of the lead agency or the cooperating agencies. This serves to alert agencies or officials who can implement these extra measures, and will encourage them to do so. The lead agency for this Proposed Action is FSA. The state partner agency is CDFG. There are no expected long-term, significant negative impacts associated with implementation of the VPA-HIP in California; therefore no mitigation measures are required.

CHAPTER 6.0 PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONTACTED

California Outdoor Heritage Alliance

California Waterfowl Association

California Farm Bureau

California Cattleman's Association

California State Department of Agriculture

California State Farm Service Agency

CHAPTER 7.0 REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 8.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

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